

The Thumper

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Summary: A small band of Resistance scouts are trapped around a thumper. Surrounded by Antlions, will any make it away alive?

The Thumper

****A.N.: ****Hey there, everyone!

> I got the idea for this story about a month ago when I was playing Half-Life 2's Highway 17 chapter. I thought to myself, "what would happen if someone got stranded at a thumper outpost?" And, hence, this story was born.
 Please leave me a review when you read this, because I really like to know what you think. Thanks!

****The Thumper****

'How long do you think that they'll stay there?' asked Mitch, still clutching at the deep cut in his knee.

'Not long,' said Ivan. He reloaded his MP7 and let off a burst of fire at the nearest Antlion, shearing off two of its legs and shattering the abdomen. It fell to the ground, screaming and thrashing around, sending up huge clouds of sand.

The other Antlions just stood where they were, hissing and snarling in their croaky voices. Two began to approach cautiously but then the thumper hit the ground again, making them scatter away. The others just stayed where they were, in a twelve-metre radius of the thumper. Some were milling about, pawing at the ground or swaying gently and croaking, but others were moving from side to side like an angry tiger in a cage.

'Hey, are you sure that they'll keep their distance?' said Rachel, who was crouched over Henry's leg with a tourniquet. 'I mean, they can _fly_ and everything and maybe they could-'

'It's possible, but unlikely,' Ivan said again, keeping his MP7

raised to his shoulder. 'They do try it occasionally, but mainly at spawning season. No need to let your guard down, though, so keep your gun close.' Rachel nodded and pulled the shotgun next to her a little closer.

The Antlions continued to circle.

There were six inside the thumper's safe area, and all of them were members of the Resistance. None of them had been seriously injured in the crash and had only just managed to get out of their truck and to the thumper. Out of the people, Mitch Bennett was the youngest, at 23. He was an excellent driver and if it hadn't been for him, everyone would have died—or been far worse off.

Mitch stared out across the sands of the beach, looking at the breakers pound calmly against the shore. The water looked so inviting and cool, especially with the sun overhead, but he knew better. Xen Leeches loved to hang around the coast in this area all year round, but during the hottest months they spawned like crazy. As a matter of fact, though Mitch, he could actually see the little baby Leeches squirming on the beach as each wave broke, trying to get back into the surf.

He turned away, wincing as he pressed the bandage too hard against his thigh. He loosened it a little bit and then finished tying it around his leg before leaning back against the base of the thumper. The four cylinders at the top dropped down one by one like drumming fingers, and the ground shuddered. Another curious Antlion had made a move but then skittered back to the outskirts.

Suddenly, the people around the thumper heard it over their earpieces. One by one, they turned to the crashed Combine APC on the sand about thirty metres away.

The APC was lying on its side, the wheels pointed up to the sky like the legs of an overturned dead cow, still spinning slowly. It was lying on top of one of the group's buggies that was now twisted beyond recognition and, as they watched, one of the APC's hatches was kicked open roughly.

Nick, the second medic of the group, whimpered and reached for his gun. Ivan moved over to him and pushed his arm down.

'But, Ivan...' began Nick, but the other man just shook his head and watched the hatch.

Slowly, clumsily, a Combine soldier staggered out of the APC. He had several light cuts on his hands and lower legs and had a few deep wounds across one shoulder, but he was still a representation of the Combine Overwatch: big, fast, dangerous and deadly. The soldier swayed on his feet for a moment, barely noticing the Antlions that were milling about the thumper's radius. None of the Resistance group breathed, trying not to alert the Combine to them.

It worked... but only just.

At almost the exact second that the Antlions noticed the Combine soldier, the soldier noticed the six resistance members huddled around the base of the thumper. Suddenly he wasn't a groggy and injured soldier but a figurehead of the Combine authority. He stood

up straight with shocking speed, ignoring the wound on his shoulder as he whipped his MP7 out of its holster and began to dash at the group, getting ready to fire.

By then the Antlions were swooping down on their prey.

The Combine noticed the seven Antlions just as they were coming down right on top of him. He let out a snarl that reverberated over the group's short-range earpieces and let his attention slip from them for a moment. He aimed up at the sky and began to fire in a non-stop smattering of bullets, tearing several of the Antlions apart.

Then, without warning, the sand in front of him split open and another Antlion popped out. The Combine turned, but far too slowly; the Antlion slashed into his torso and then threw him viciously against the second APC wreck, which was about ten metres away from the first. He yelped as the Antlion struck but let out a bloodcurdling shriek as he hit a chunk of wreckage sticking out of the APC and folded backwards with a loud crack that broke the air like a sledgehammer on ice.

The Combine tumbled to the ground and skidded over the sand, dead. Mitch watched the scene in fascinated shock and awe. The Combine lay spread-eagled on the sand dune and stayed there, perfectly still. One of the Antlions came up to the body and poked at it roughly and, when seeing that he was dead, burrowed back into the sand and sent up a cloud of dust.

'...whoa,' said Mitch. The group looked at the body for a moment before crowding back around the thumper's base. It hit the ground again, shaking it and sending the Antlions back.

x-x-x

'Hello? Is anybody reading this, over? This is Nicolas Sandweiss. We are stranded at a Combine thumper that is active but abandoned. We require assistance. Anybody, LHP, NLO, do you read?'

'Give it up, Nick,' said Frida. She was crouched on the ground with her long-barreled rifle in her hands, drinking from her water canteen. Nick glared at her and put down his radio.

'Hey, I don't know about you, but I don't exactly plan on dying out here, okay?' he said. He sounded perfectly calm and looked it, too, but his eyes suggested otherwise. Frida just shrugged.

'I just thought that you could... oh, I don't know, maybe wait until later or use the radio sparingly.'

'And why's that?'

'Because we'd been scouting for well over four hours before being discovered and the batteries could be very low,' Frida replied matter-of-factly. Nick thought for a moment, then put the radio back into its holster and sat down on the sand.

Ivan was walking back and forth, holding his MP7 at the ready. He was wearily watching the Antlions as they scurried about on the beach. The sun had started to set and was casting a wave of orange light over the thumper and beach, giving it an eerie appearance. One

Antlion was braying at the group on the edge of the thumper's radius. It let out a croaky hiss at Ivan as he walked past, and he made a similar noise. The Antlion went quiet and just stood where it was, pawing at the ground.

Mitch was leaning up against the Thumper's base, staring up at the sky and the stars. He could remember how when he had been six he had wanted to know what lay past the limits of the sky, what was lying up there around all of the stars. He remembered that he had just come back from school and had learned about the planets, and how the sun was actually a star that was really close to the Earth. His mother had taken him outside when it was dark and shown him the stars...

Mitch felt a tear run down his cheek and he wiped it away, looking away from the stars and back towards the APC wreckage. All that it was now a long-past memory, almost old enough to be a part of ancient history, it seemed. He watched the APC as one of its wheels, practically torn loose in the crash, swung dumbly in the wind. It creaked gently which, when you added the faint splashing of waves on the shore and the twittering of birds preparing to roost, made the night almost peaceful enough to sleep...

Gunfire broke through the night. But the group only looked up momentarily, checking to see if it was Ivan, another Combine, or some other soul who might have been unfortunate enough to have been stranded out on the beach. It was just Ivan telling the Antlions to "back off" in his usual sensitive way.

'So, how long do you think that it'll take for them to come out here and get us?' said Rachel, who had just finished having a drink. Mitch shrugged, and Nick answered.

'I don't know. Evidently they must have heard the Combine radio chatter, because they aren't answering their radios,' he said, thumbing the antenna on top of his radio set. 'I'll try again in the morning and make sure about it. But until then we'd better just keep our heads down and settle in for the night.'

'What if the Combine comes looking?' Mitch asked. Nick shrugged.

'I don't know. Whenever it gets close to spawning season for anything out here, they tend to keep away. If one of their units goes missing, then they make assumptions. Besides, the other APC exploded and they might have assumed the others did the same.'

Mitch thought about it, and then turned back to Nick.

'But what if they come looking for their missing men?' he asked. Nick thumbed the holster of his gun.

'Then we'd better sleep lightly,' he said grimly.

x-x-x

It was at about eight in the morning when Mitch woke up. Henry, Rachel and Nick were still asleep, and Ivan looked like he might have been. But when Mitch went over to wake him the guy just looked up at him as if to say "Yes? What do you want?". Mitch just nodded and smiled weakly before limping off to where he had left his gun.

The Antlions were apparently uninterested now, because there were only half as many hovering around the outskirts of the thumper. Only two of them appeared to be watching the group with their beady eyes, and the others were just milling about and not paying the slightest amount of attention to them. Mitch noticed that a few of the Antlions were curled up on the sand, appearing to be fast asleep.

Mitch sat back down on the sand, looking back out at the wreckage of the vehicles. For about three days, the group had been camped out on a rocky outcrop that stood above the old Highway 21. They had been reporting to Lighthouse Point about the movement of Combine airships when one of them noticed the lookouts on the rock. Despite the camouflage, they had been noticed pretty quickly.

The group had several buggies with them, most designed to carry at least three people at a stretch. As soon as they had started the buggy's engines, a pair of Combine APC's appeared and gave chase to the group. The chase didn't last for very long and ended up on the beach, where one of the buggies was cut down. Of course, things than went very, very bad, if they hadn't already.

Henry had started firing one of the Gauss guns at the Combine APC closest to the group and had fired straight into the man engine. The thing swerved out of control, then sped up and slammed into the same buggy as Henry and snapped his leg almost in two. Mitch had just managed to get his buggy out of the way before the Combine APC burst into flames and exploded, hurling chunks of red-hot metal everywhere. The second APC crashed into the first, spun out of control and flipped over twice, landing on top of a second buggy.

Then the Antlions decided to make the part all that little bit more fun.

After a brief firefight with one of the Combine survivors, the group had made a mad dash to one of the Combine's thumpers. They were spread out over beaches at regular intervals, just for light vehicles under attack by xenofauna.

Mitch broke his train of thought and looked at the wreckage once again. The buggy that he had been driving was in okay condition, but it was too far away from the thumper " at least thirty metres " and he'd be taken down _long_ before he even got near it. The detonated APC had stopped burning almost immediately after it had crashed but its hull was still smouldering. The second was still on its side, the loose wheel swaying back and forth slowly-

'Holy _Shit!_'

Mitch spun around. He had been wrong about the sleeping Antlions on the edge of the thumper. They had just been waiting there, barely moving as to catch their prey off-guard. Ten of them were buzzing right over to the still sleeping members of the group, and it was-

There was the ear-splitting _crack _of automatic weapon fire. Ivan had come charging around from the opposite side of the thumper and was firing his MP7 straight into the middle of the Antlion group, blowing huge chunks of alien carapace and spatters of blood everywhere.

The rest of the Resistance group woke up.

In a split second, they were up and firing madly, their bullets tearing into the abdomens of the Antlions. One was split vertically and just dropped out of the air like a stone. But there were too many and, in a horrifying instant, they were attacking.

Mitch wasted no time. With a guttural roar, he ran straight at the nearest Antlion and began firing. The head of the insect was torn to shreds and it fell heavily onto the sand, but no sooner had it done that than a second came up and prepared to gut Mitch where he stood. He still had several bullets left, though, and fired straight into the thing.

Then the gun began to click.

Empty.

'Ah, shit!' he groaned as the injured Antlion leapt at him. Mitch yanked the shoulder guard out of the weapon and swung it at the base of the Antlion's head, digging it straight in under its carapace and tearing half of the skull off. It fell to the floor, gurgling, and then he moved off to the others.

The fight had ended almost as soon as it had begun. Ivan was already reloading and Rachel looked to be in shock, but she was helping Frida with a nasty cut that ran down her shoulder.

'Is everyone alright?' asked Mitch. Henry, propped up on the base of the thumper, looked up at him with grave eyes.

'No, man, everybody's not okay,' he said. Mitch turned to the edge of the thumper's radius and was Nick lying in the sand, covered in blood from a series of deep holes and cuts down his chest. Blood had splattered across the sand and was mixing with the Antlion blood, completing the grisly picture. And, to top it off, Nick's radio was smashed.

It was still lying in his vest pocket.

x-x-x

'This is fantastic, isn't it?' said Henry. He was glaring at the body of Nick and several Antlions that were now scuttling sideways around the thumper's radius, watching the group intently with mean, hungry eyes. One of them was soaked with blood and tatters of clothes that matched Nick's vest and shirt.

'That _bastard_, ' said Henry. 'I'll get that one for that.'

'Hey. Save your ammunition or you'll regret it later,' said Ivan, who was carefully cleaning his MP7 and handgun. It was now midday and, under the sweltering sun with no real chance of getting into the shade, things were looking grim.

'I know that,' said Henry. 'I just... you know...'

'Yes, I understand what you mean perfectly. But we need to wait,' finished Ivan, and he continued to stare out over the beach.

Out of all the people huddled around the thumper, Ivan seemed to be the only one that was either not affected by the heat or couldn't have cared less about it. Mitch had taken off his heavy vest had could feel sweat pouring down his forehead in rivulets. He wiped the back of his hand across his forehead and then flicked it off before taking another swig out of his water canteen.

'Hey, I just have a question,' said Rachel. 'The earpieces we're using, are they too short-range to use as radios to Lighthouse Point or NLO?'

'Yes,' said Mitch.

'If they had a greater range then we would have used them already,' said Frida, now holding Nick's MP7. 'Besides, Nick did say that NLO could send out a rescue dispatch for us.'

Mitch sighed and looked back out towards the overturned Combine APC. Something about it kept on bothering him, but he couldn't quite put his finger on it. There had only been the one Overwatch soldier that had crawled out yesterday, and all the rest had probably been killed in the crash. But still the unease held Mitch.

Wincing briefly at the pain in his leg, Mitch stood up and walked gingerly away from the thumper. He was careful to keep his distance from the edge of the thumper's radius, remembering how people had been caught by an Antlion because of their reach. He peered at the body of the Combine soldier, still lying face-down in the sand.

The body had bled heavily into the sand from the injuries that the Antlions had given him, and for a little distance around the sand was a dull red. Mitch peered at the body, noticing the footsteps that terminated a short distance from the-

Mitch paused. Footsteps? But the Combine was thrown at the APC and bounced off, he didn't-

Gunfire erupted from behind the APC.

Mitch screamed and made a mad dash back to the thumper's base as quickly as he could, trying to avoid the bullets that were spraying into the ground and sending geysers of sand into the air. He ignored the pain in his leg and launched himself to the ground, sliding alongside the thumper and reaching the side opposite to the APC before rolling behind the base.

Ivan ran sideways and just managed to get behind the base as a fresh blast of bullets kicked up a storm at his heels. He yelped with pain and landed right beside Mitch, then began to cradle his leg.

Henry began to yell and started firing when, suddenly, blood began to spray everywhere as he was peppered with bullets. Rachel was on her feet and tried to get behind the thumper just as she was hit in the foot and knocked across the sand.

'Rachel!' yelled Mitch. She tried to stand, but then a fresh volley of bullets struck her and she lay on the sand, unmoving.

'Oh no,' muttered Mitch. 'Oh no, oh shit...'

'Hey, at least you're unscathed,' grunted Ivan, still holding his leg. He had been hit twice in the shin but had already applied a tourniquet to stem the bleeding. Frida was crouched beside them, breathing heavily and holding her MP7 at the ready.

'Where's the rifle?' asked Mitch. Frida gestured at the ground a few metres away from the base. It was lying out in the open, which would make any person trying to get it an easy target for the Combine. The earpieces of the team suddenly crackled into life.

'_Members of the Resistance,'_ it said. The voice was cold, emotionless, and had a croakiness to it that sounded mildly like a computer, _'You have been targeted by the Sector 21 Combine Overwatch for activities against the main governing body. You are going to surrender of your own will or you will be made to surrender. The remainder of Sector 21 Overwatch will not hesitate to execute you for your actions if you do attempt to fight.'_

Mitch licked his lips and peered out through the bottom of the four cylinders of the thumper. He couldn't see anything, but assumed that the Combine was most likely on top of the overturned APC. And, judging by how fast he had been shooting, he only had an MP7. That worked on the group's side, because of the range.

'What should we do?' he whispered. Ivan rolled onto his stomach and stared at the APC through the bottom of the Thumper cylinders. He didn't move for a minute, then turned to both Mitch and Frida.

'I have no idea what to do,' Ivan said, shaking his head. 'If we still had the rifle we could pick him out, but now...'

'What if we use a grenade to flip the APC?' asked Frida. Mitch and Ivan looked at her.

'Really?'

'Yeah, it would make sense,' she said. 'If we hit the thing with enough explosives it will detonate. But if we get one just under the APC's high side, then we can probably flip it over and flush him out.'

'But what if he isn't killed?' said Mitch. Frida smirked.

'Remember our little friends back there?' she said, gesturing to the Antlions that were stalking around the thumper again. Mitch looked at them and then grinned. As if in agreement, the Antlion closest to him let out a croaky hiss.

x-x-x

'_Members of the Resistance,'_ said the Combine again, _'you are to be taken to the nearest Nova Prospekt Rehabilitation and Conditioning Centre if you do not surrender and disarm yourselves immediately. I repeat, you are to be...'_

Mitch grunted as he accidentally pulled the sore muscle in his leg. Bracing himself, he began to climb the thumper's tower, ignoring the droning and horribly metallic voice of the Combine soldier.

At the start of the mission, each member of the group had been given a pack of one hand grenade and two for their MP7 launchers. Ivan and Frida had given their remaining ones to Mitch, who had been completely out. They all hoped that those, coupled with his single hand grenade, would be enough to flip the APC.

Mitch went hand-over-hand to the top of the tower, getting a good grip on the top strut before loading the under-slung grenade launcher. He peered around the side of the tower, checking to see if he could get a good view of the Combine soldier on his perch.

Mitch couldn't see anything. The sides of the APC was glinting under the midday sun and shining into his eyes making it impossible to see. He reached down into his pocket and pulled out a pair of small binoculars and looked through them at the APC. At first, it was the same thing. He couldn't see if there was anything on top, but then a black object shifted slightly and he saw the Combine with crystal clarity. It was perched in such a way that, unless you saw the flipped APC from an angle, you'd miss him.

Mitch gritted his teeth and pumped the grenade launcher. He carefully placed the gun on top of the strut that he was holding, trying to steady it so that he could pull the angle off perfectly. He moved the barrel up and down slightly, testing it, before he held his breath and pulled the trigger.

There was only a slight _ka-thud_ sound as the grenade fired. It sailed through the air and slammed into the ground... six metres short of the APC!

Mitch swore and got ready to fire again just as a volley of bullets slammed into the top of the thumper tower. There were sparks ringing out in every direction, blinding him, and the noise was terrifyingly loud. Mitch screamed "â€" and then felt the bullets tear into his stomach.

The wind was knocked out of him in an instant. Mitch lowered his hand to try and hold his stomach but as he did so, he accidentally dropped the MP7. It took him a few second to realise that he'd actually dropped it, but by then it was too late.

He was shot and dying, and now there was no way to get the APC flipped over.

Mitch groaned.

x-x-x

'Mitch!' screamed both Ivan and Frida at the same time. He convulsed as at least ten bullets tore into his leg and stomach but somehow he found the strength to hold on.

But then he dropped the gun.

It smacked into the base of the thumper and spiraled away into the sand, and then Mitch groaned. He tried to haul himself back up but then a second wave of bullets slammed into the tower, making him slump back. Another bullet hit him in the leg and this time he screamed out loud, blood starting to drip from his wounds.

Ivan stood up despite the holes in his leg. Before Frida could stop him, he was running out from behind the thumper and firing like mad at the APC. She gritted her teeth and before he ran out of bullets, she began to fire at the APC too.

Mitch felt groggy and dizzy. He felt that he was able to think straight; that was, apart from the blinding pain running down his abdomen, and he began to grope for the gun lying in the sand. Everything seemed to be going in slow motion: first Ivan dashed out and began to shoot, and the Frida did as well.

Then she looked up at him.

'Mitch...' she said, her voice sounding unusually deep, 'you... haveâ€¦ to... _throw... the... _grenade_.'

Grenade? Mitch thought. What grenade? The grenades were in the gun, you _idiots_. Now I can't shoot back. I thought that _I_ was supposed to be the one that was far-sighted-

Then everything became clear again.

The world began to play back at normal speed. Mitch still had a single hand grenade attached to his belt. Feeling empowered, Mitch took hold of the grenade and pulled it off his belt. Gritting his teeth and inhaling sharply as he lifted his arm and pulled the pin, Mitch had one final conscious thought:

Leave them alone, you asshole.

He threw the grenade with all his might and then everything went black.

x-x-x

The Combine Overwatch was lying spread-eagled on the underside of the overturned APC.

It was about midday and the sun was hanging lazily in the sky, making everything clear and bright. Even though he couldn't think as a true individual anymore, the Combine was feeling good.

The day before, he had been doing a scouting run inside an APC when the Combine radio announced that spies, no doubt a part of the Resistance, had been spotted watching a training camp. Immediately, he and another group of soldiers had headed off to the area to investigate and arrest.

It came as little surprise when he had seen the small group of buggies fleeing the scene. Dedicated to the might of the Third Combine Empire and pissed as hell at any resistance person or group, he had given chase and ended up crashing on the beach, where he was knocked out cold.

When he had woken up, it had been night. Cautiously, the Combine had peered out of the hatch and had seen the other soldier dead on the ground about eight metres away. After about half an hour of trying not to attract the Antlions, he had gotten the dead soldier's guns and equipment, and then went back inside the APC until morning.

When the sun had come back up, he had gotten ready to implement his plan into motion. He was going to call for the Resistance scum to surrender, and if they didn't they'd be shot. Quite frankly, given that this Combine was a commanding officer, he would have made sure that the Resistance members at the thumper got turned into Stalkers... and that was what he considered to be light punishment.

Now, after having survived the first, pitiful grenade attack, the Combine prepared to blast away both of the scum that were shooting at him and the APC. If he still had the capacity to, the Combine would have smiled.

He didn't notice the grenade until he heard the rapid clicking.

The Combine felt his heart, or at least what was left of it, skip a beat, and he peered over the edge of the APC just barely enough to see the grenade roll under it, red light flashing rapidly. The Combine immediately stood up, turned around and leapt off of the underside, a bare split second before the grenade exploded.

The ground shuddered and the APC seemed to flip up and stand on the edge of its wheels for a second, just before it fell the right way up again with a shudder and rocked back and forth for several seconds. The Combine stood up and cocked his gun, ready for any Antlions or Resistance that were dumb enough to face him. As he got to the side hatch of the APC and peered inside, though, he froze.

The interior was on fire from the grenade. And not just any fire, but a huge, roaring one that was moving towards the ammunition of the main cannon and the fuel line.

The Combine immediately turned on his heels and made a beeline for the thumper, not caring about what was there. An Antlion jumped at him and he blasted it out of the air, sending it tumbling down the dunes of the beach in a shattered, bleeding mess. He had only gotten about five metres away when the APC finally exploded.

The detonation was colossal. The Combine felt himself get yanked back slightly as the engine began to implode, and then he was shot through the air at an incredible speed, feeling like his back was on fire. Suddenly, he slammed bodily into the ground and tossed up a massive cloud of sand. He bounced, arms and legs flailing helplessly like those of a rag doll, and then the world went black.

x-x-x

The Combine felt himself begin to stir.

He could feel a stinging sensation on his back, like he had either broken a few bones or had been burned slightly. The Combine shook his head, trying to get rid of the dizziness, and then propped himself up on his arms. He could feel his foot tapping against something, and before he could try to speculate about what it could have been he felt the ground shake softly beneath him.

The Combine grinned as he heard the Antlions squeal slightly and back off. He managed to get on his knees and then tried to stand up. A wave of fresh dizziness swept over his head and he nearly fell back down, but he shook his head once more and the dizziness was cleared.

The Combine felt the back of his bullet-proof vest and felt scorched Kevlar and fabric there. Looking around, he saw that the sun was still high in the sky, perhaps it was one o'clock, and that the APC was completely destroyed but there was still a buggy there. Grinning, the Combine started to form a plan. He would just go out to the buggy, kill any Antlion on the way to it, and then-

He stopped. Slowly, the Combine felt around on his gun holster to find the backup MP7 that he was required to carry. It wasn't there.

Annoyed, the Combine looked around for his other weapon in the sand, but couldn't see it. Then he realised that the bodies were gone. The bodies of the Resistance scum had disappeared, and their weapons had too!

Now starting to get angry, the Combine approached the thumper and was about to check if there were any other weapons near it when he noticed something scrawled on the side of the thumper's dark grey shell. Cocking his head, the Combine approached it.

He read it quickly, and then felt his heart skip another beat. It said:

_We had to leave pretty quickly, so, sorry that we left you with a busted buggy and no weapons. The buggy that we took was almost out of batteries, so we had to improvise. Just thought you might want to know. _

P.S. I sure hope that, for your own sake, you can run fast.

The Combine felt a chill seep up his back. At the base of the thumper, a panel had been removed and a tangle of wires was hanging out. The Combine leaned down and looked in at it, seeing that all of the thumper's main batteries had been removed. A tiny backup battery was powering it, but it had a tiny green light that was blinking rapidly.

Almost out of power.

As if on cue, the thumper began to slow down. The thuds began to get more spaced out and a fast, low pitch being filled the air.

The Antlions stood on the edge of the thumper's radius, letting out their croaky hiss.

End
file.